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We're Going to Ruin the Ending: The Split-Radar Returns Did It

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Publishers who sell paperback mysteries for $2.98 may be envious of the Federal Aviation Administration's regional office in Anchorage, Alaska. The office is offering a pricey mystery that's drawing a lot of attention—a $194.30 unbound collection of reports dealing with the celebrated sighting of a UFO by a Japan Air Lines pilot over the Arctic Ocean last Nov. 17.

"We've sold 50 complete packages so far," and received about 300 orders for portions, says Paul Steucke, an FAA spokesman in Anchorage.

Glossy Color Photos

In consideration of UFO-watchers whose resources aren't astronomical, the agency will sell separately any of the 20 items in the collection. These include a $50 cassette recording of the conversation between flight controllers and the JAL crew during the 50-minute encounter, and a $56 set of glossy color photos of radar readouts. The prices are based on the cost of reproducing the materials.

Orders continue to roll in despite the FAA's conclusion—in a separate report that costs nothing—that it couldn't substantiate the sighting. Its technical experts in Atlantic City, N.J., said blips on a radar screen that appeared to confirm an object in the vicinity of the JAL jet were actually "split-radar returns"—shadows of the plane's primary echo.

The conclusion was bolstered, says Mr. Steucke, by a report of a United Airlines pilot who, at the request of Anchorage flight controllers, flew near the path of the JAL jet at the time of the mysterious radar readings. He saw no other aircraft.

The FAA normally doesn't get into either the UFO or the publishing business. But it investigated this incident because an aircraft might have ventured unreported into the airspace of the JAL cargo carrier, which was en route from Iceland to Anchorage, Mr. Steucke says.

A Pilot's View

And though the agency routinely makes certain reports available, it has been as as mystified by the demand for its costly documents as some people are by the sighting itself. But the graphic testimony of Kenju Terauchi, the JAL pilot who reported the sighting, probably hasn't hurt sales.

He told the FAA immediately after the incident that he had been followed by two strands of lights, pulsating with amber glows, and a huge craft that appeared to be a "mother ship." He later said the large UFO was the "size of two battleships" and appeared to be made by "a very high technology and intelligence."

FAA says UFO on radar screen was just a double image of jet

United Press International

ANCHORAGE — Federal investigators say a review of radar tapes failed to show a UFO shadowing a Japan Air Lines cargo jet, contradicting reports made by the crew and the air-traffic controller who handled the plane.

The Federal Aviation Administration's examination of the tapes shows what appears to be a second object near JAL Flight 1628 on Nov. 17, but investigators now think it is a double image from the Boeing 747, FAA spokesman Paul Steucke said yesterday.

On Dec. 29 the FAA released details of the UFO sighting, revealing the flight controller handling the jet saw an object on radar five miles from the plane. The Anchorage Air Route Traffic Control Center directed the crew to take evasive maneuvers, including a 4,000-foot drop and a 360-degree turn.

Co-pilot Takanori Tamefuji, 39, said yesterday he did not know why the FAA first confirmed a nearby object and now dismisses it as an image of the 747.

In his second interview with the FAA Tuesday, Tamefuji reiterated that he saw lights, and Steucke said, "The co-pilot's testimony supported the pilot's."

Although the FAA is satisfied with the double-image explanation, the inquiry is continuing with interviews of the crew and a review of data, Steucke said.

Steucke said the pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer have told the same story: Blinking yellow, amber and green lights appeared too close to their plane for comfort.

The FAA says the controller apparently misinterpreted what he saw on his screen. But Steucke defended the controller's response, saying, "He had a pilot tell him he was seeing something right there. This is not something where he can take a risk even if it is a double image."

The radar image seen in the JAL cockpit and by the controller also appeared intermittently on Air Force radar. Air Force spokesmen dismissed it as "random clutter."

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